

SENATE FISH AND GAME
EXHIBIT NO. 4
DATE 4-9-13
BILL NO. HB 580

House Bill 580
April 9, 2013
Presented by Paul Sihler
Senate Fish and Game Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Paul Sihler, Administrator of the Field Service Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here today on behalf of the Director in support of HB 580.

With one of the strongest remaining populations of sage grouse, Montana has a key role to play in ensuring that sage grouse do not become a listed species under the federal Endangered Species Act. The establishment of an Advisory Council as proposed by Governor Bullock is a wise approach to ensuring that Montana develops a conservation strategy for sage grouse that precludes the need for the species to be listed, while also minimizing the impacts on energy development and agricultural activities in the state.

In its determination that sage grouse are warranted for listing, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identified the modification and loss of sage brush habitat from energy development and agricultural operations as the primary threat to sage grouse. For this reason, we believe that the state general fund is the appropriate source of funding for this appropriation.

The Department would like to suggest two amendments to the bill. The first would make the appropriation for FY 13 and to add language that any unexpended/unencumbered balance of the appropriation is reappropriated for the 2015 biennium. The second is for an immediate effective date. The USFWS is completing its status review of sage grouse in September 2014, and this will be the basis for its endangered species listing decision. As a result of that time frame, we can't afford to wait until July (next fiscal year) for the Sage Grouse Habitat Counservtion Advisory Council to meet. We expect to hold meetings yet this fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I will be here to answer any questions.